The Idols of Our Lives

Zanesville, OH | March 31, 2019 | John Pollard | Sermon Notes

**Foundational Scripture:** Judg. 18:22-24

**Intro**:

* Two stories form the epilogue of the book of Judges. They both reference a time in Israel’s history in which there was no king (Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1) and *“everyone did what was right in his own eyes”* (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). And as you can imagine, with a phrase like that, is there really anything good to expect? These stories also occur at a time where a generation arose *“who did not know the LORD”* (Judg. 2:10). Neither story contains anything of good report. There is no positive outlook and no silver lining. Sin is as bad as it has ever been and the people are as far away from God as they can be. I want to draw your attention, however, to the first story in the epilogue. It is a story that deals with a severe and sad case of idolatry and selfishness. I would like us to consider the **Idols of Our Lives** and how we can be different than Micah and those of his household and how we need to be different. But first, allow me to define idols from two standpoints:
  + **Primary use in OT**: *“An image, form or representation, usually of a man or other animal, consecrated as an object of worship; a pagan deity. Idols are usually statues or images, carved out of wood or stone, or formed of metals, particularly silver or gold”* (Webster).
  + **Primary use Today**: *“An idol is anything on which we set our affections; that to which we indulge an excessive and sinful attachment. It is anything which usurps the place of God in the hearts of his rational creatures”* (Webster).

**What are some of the major idols in our lives?**

1. **Internet/Entertainment**
   1. Idols today are all about what makes us feel better about our images, whatever makes us feel safe and secure while expanding our comfort zones at the same time. The cyberworld and the entertainment industry has for some time now taken a firm hold of the family and the society across the globe but especially in western culture. They are truly the most popular idols of our lives today if not the number one idols of our lives!
   2. As major advancements have been made in technology and the age of information, so too, we have grown to like, love and serve these objects, mediums and platforms. The internet and entertainment has become idols in our lives. Here are some startling facts and statistics:
      1. The CEO of Netflix has raved about their dominance in the entertainment industry so much to the point that he stated that their number 1 competitor is sleep and Netflix is winning. Netflix has become synonymous with the growing phrase: Binge-watching. He further touted that *“binge watching puts the viewer/customer in control.”* The CEO added that they are growing so fast and gaining so many customers that binge watching will shortly become a thing of the past now that Binge-racing is name of the game. Netflix is selling idolatry and people are buying! Entertainment has truly become an idol of our lives.
      2. What about the internet? Things like pornography, lust and others forms of sexual entertainment are as rampant as ever and they only continue to increase. Part of the reason is because more and more people are finding this morally acceptable (43% of all Americans, Gallup poll 2018).
      3. Emarket.com reports that the average US adult will spend 93 minutes per day engaging in digital video in 2019. Furthermore, they say that the average American spends 24 hours per week on the internet (3.4 hrs. per day).
      4. Adweek.com says that according to a study done by Mediakix, the average person will spend more than 5 years of their life on social media. With all the devices that we have today and the number of platforms and media we can easily access at the tips of our fingers, it is no wonder that the internet and entertainment has become the idols of our lives.
   3. For some of you here today this may not even be an issue but for the rest of us it could be a major problem. What can we do to improve on this? How can we shut this down so that we may not fall into the same predicament as Micah (Judg. 18:24)? How can we fix this before it’s too late?
   4. As Christians, there is no room for idols in our lives. We can’t have God and our idols. Our time should be spent being wise and redeeming the time (not wasting time) because the days are evil (Eph. 5:15-17). We need to understand God’s will for our lives and live for Him. Our time should be spent growing, helping others come to Jesus and worshipping God. Here are some suggestions that may help in controlling and deterring the idols that are internet and entertainment:
      1. **Set boundaries for yourself**: If you are someone who spends too much time on the internet and too much time binge watching shows and movies or you are just addicted to entertainment, it would be a good idea to start to set some boundaries. Find an accountability partner who will help you to control these habits. Set an alarm to remind yourself it’s time to turn off the tv, tablet, computer or phone and get back to those things which are truly important. Keep a journal of how you spend your time weekly and evaluate and make changes accordingly.
      2. **Take those thoughts captive:** We must practice and learn to take our thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:5). Arrest them and throw them in solitary confinement. Do not allow lust, envy, covetousness and malice rule your life. Don’t let that be the reason you’re seeking the internet and entertainment.
      3. **Seek help from others:** Ask others for help. We may often think that we are going through something alone or that our situation is unique. We are not the only ones. Let’s be people who are willing to swallow pride, humble ourselves and ask for help.
      4. **Pray and turn to God’s word:** More than anything else and more importantly that anything else, if we want to defeat the idol of the internet and entertainment and really any and all idols, we must make it a habit to pray to God and read His word. Jesus was tempted just as we are. He knows what we are going through (Heb. 4:12-15). Make time and devote yourself to the bible and to prayer.
2. **Work/Jobs/Money**
   1. Another major idol of our lives is work, our jobs or our money. It’s all essentially the same thing. In one sense, we enslave ourselves to our jobs so that we can find the money to support the other idols (internet, entertainment etc.). In another sense, we may commit to long, never ending hours of work to cash in our paychecks for our love of money, materials and self.
   2. Paul told Timothy and the brethren where Timothy was that this attitude, this idol will not lead us anywhere good (1 Tim. 6:9-10). If we are already committed to other idols like the internet and entertainment then the temptation is to work more and more so we can keep up with that because we do not want to give it up.
   3. As Christians, we must be about the Lord’s business first and foremost (1 Cor. 15:58). That’s the work that matters most to God. The bible does not discourage the need for jobs and money but it does warn us not to put it over God. We are to be about the business of lost souls (Matt. 9:37-38) and our brothers and sisters in Christ (Heb. 10:24-25) and the word of God (Jn. 6:27-28).
   4. Our work and our money may become an idol of our lives if we seek to live beyond our means. If we seek to please men, impress others and one-up each other, then we will do what it takes to achieve such and it is usually enslavement to work and money. We must instead be content and strive for godliness (1 Tim. 6:6).
   5. Reflect on your daily habits and how you spend your time. If your bible reading, prayer life, time spent with Christians, evangelism etc. is being affected by your work habits then it may be high time to re-evaluate that and make some changes. Take heed lest our jobs and our money become the idols of our lives.
3. **Emotions**
   1. A major source of excessive indulgence is our emotions. We treasure our feelings and safe spaces to the point that our emotions rule our standards, decisions and overall lifestyle. We allow our emotions to become the idols of our lives.
   2. In fact, we do this so often and take it so far that the worship of God changes. We allow our eyes to see things it shouldn’t and our minds to digest filth it mustn’t because of how we feel and how it makes us feel.
   3. Jesus strongly rebuked many people on many different occasions. On one particular occasion he rebuked His own friend and disciple (Matt. 16:23). Yet on another occasion, Jesus made an entire discourse rebuking the Jewish religious leaders calling them hypocrites, sons of hell, blind guides, snakes and even sons of the devil (Matt. 23:13-33; Jn. 8:44).
   4. Is it wrong to have emotions or show emotion? No. The bible says of Jesus that He wept (Jn. 11:35). In another place, the bible tells us He was deeply distressed (Mk. 14:34). Jesus did not let His emotions get the better of Him. He instead submitted Himself to God and He died on the cross.
   5. We need to practice self-control (Prov. 4:23; 25:28; Phil. 4:6). We must not allow our emotions to control us and rule over us to the point we start desiring changes that God has not authorized. When our emotions become our idol, we start to engage in practices that God hates. We consume things that make us enemies of God. Control of our emotions is key (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Pet. 1:6) lest it become an idol of our lives.
4. **Family/Friends**
   1. Jesus spoke truthfully and openly about the danger of making our families or our friends our idols (Matt. 10:34-37). Family is one of the greatest blessings of life. The relationships that we share with our friends and relatives are important for moral, physical and mental reason.
   2. However, Jesus made it abundantly clear that at no time must they ever take precedence over Him. He must always come first. We must not allow our families or friends to dictate the course of our spiritual lives. They must not become an idol of our lives.
   3. If your friend sends you a text or calls you asking to get together for coffee, lunch or a movie and you know you need to be worshipping God, reading your bible, praying to Him or spending time with your brethren, then let them know you can reschedule or you’ll be a little late. God comes first.
   4. If your family gets you tickets to see your favorite sports team play and it happens to be on a Sunday and you know it will compromise your ability to worship God and be with your brethren, let them know you appreciate the gesture but you won’t be able to do that. God comes first and my brothers and sisters in Christ comes first.
   5. If your friends push you towards sin and spending more time on the internet, entertainment, money or being about your emotions, let them know you don’t do that anymore. And if they can’t be with you because of that then so be it. Jesus will still be your friend. Surround yourself with friends that will make you better and not bitter.
   6. If your family engages in activities that as a Christian you know you shouldn’t be a part of, then in a respective and calm manner, remove yourself. Let them know why you can’t be a part of that anymore and that God rules your life and His commands are what you need to be a part of. Let us be careful lest we allow our families and friends to become an idol of our lives.

**Conclusion:** Micah’s idolatry and the idols of our lives today are symptoms of a large problem. The real issue and the root idol is: **Selfishness!** We do these things and engage in these things because they satisfy us, they make us feel secure and comfortable. It is easy; it is convenient. Selfishness leads us to investigate more and more depraving desires. It seeks to satisfy the flesh in any way possible and at all costs possible. Self-indulgence, self-righteousness and self-efficiency is what these idols promote. That is why Jesus said that we must deny self (Lk. 9:23-25). If we truly desire to follow Jesus, if we truly desire eternal life and if we call ourselves His disciples then we must deny self. The only self in God’s vocabulary is selflessness. Jesus denied Himself and healed the multitudes. He denied Himself and washed the feet of His disciples. He denied Himself and suffered and died on the cross. Until our lives become more about Him and others and less about us (Phil. 2:3-8), then Micah’s example has lived on in us. Let’s make changes that we need to. Let’s get rid of the idols of our lives and cling to the one who is God alone: Jesus the Christ.